

Message Text

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LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.IOM 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, KS, US

SUBJECT: VIEWS OF SENIOR KOREAN OFFICIALS

SUMMARY: DURING PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, IN PREPARATION FOR DEPARTING TO US, I HAVE MET WITH VIRTUALLY ALL TOP ROKG OFFICIALS. BASIC IMPRESSION FROM THEIR COMMENTS IS MOOD OF RELAXATION, CONFIDENCE, AND ALMOST SMUGNESS WITH CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN KOREA. LACK OF ANY MAJOR ISSUES BETWEEN US AND ROK, FROM VIEWPOINT ROKG, WAS ALSO CONSPICUOUS. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING MY FINAL CALLS, I MET WITH PRIME MINISTER CH'OE KYU-HA, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER NAM DUCK WOO, PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARY GENERAL KIM CHONG-YOM, SPEAKER CHONG IL-KWON, MINISTER NATIONAL DEFENSE SUH JYONG-CHUL, AND HAD AN INFORMAL CHAT WITH KCIA DIRECTOR SHIN CHIK-SU AND HIS PRINCIPAL INTERNAL DEPUTY, GENERAL YANG TU-WON. I HAVE ALSO BEEN IN VERY CLOSE TOUCH WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PARK TONG-JIN ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS, AND MET WITH AMBASSADOR HAM PYONG-CH'UN DURING HIS CONSULTATIONS IN SEOUL.

2. VIRTUALLY TO THE MAN, EVERYONE OF THESE TOP OFFICIALS EXPRESSED GREAT CONFIDENCE AND SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT

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STATE OF DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC. AFTER

TWO YEARS OF CONCERN REGARDING SUCH MAJOR PROBLEMS AS OIL CRISIS, RECESSION, CREDIBILITY OF US COMMITMENT, VIETNAM/ CAMBODIA PULLOUTS, AND INTERNAL UNREST, THEY ALL BELIEVE THAT KOREA IS NOW TURNING A CORNER AND IS MOVING AHEAD VERY WELL. WHILE THE DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT OF ECONOMIC PROSPECTS IS HIGHLIGHTED, THE TOP LEADERSHIP HERE IS PARTICULARLY SATISFIED WITH THE STABLE EQUILIBRIUM AND QUIESCENCE ON THE POLITICAL FRONT. THERE IS FAR LESS TALK OF NORTH KOREAN THREAT, ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS A MATTER OF MAJOR CONCERN.

3. KIM CHONG-YOM AND KCIA DIRECTOR SHIN, WHO ARE PROBABLY THE TWO OFFICIALS CLOSEST TO PRESIDENT PARK, EXPECT NO NEW DEVELOPMENTS OR CHANGES ON THE INTERNAL SCENE, WITH NO NEW ADDITIONAL CONTROLS ANTICIPATED, THE OPPOSITION, WHILE DISSATISFIED, SEEMS PREPARED TO ACQUIESCE AND NOT SERIOUSLY CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PRESENT. NONE OF THE OFFICIALS GAVE ANY SIGN, HOWEVER, OF PLANS TO RELINQUISH CONTROLS -- ALTHOUGH SEVERAL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY BE SAFE IN THE PRESENT MOOD OF THE COUNTRY TO DO SO, AND ALL RECOGNIZED THE CONCERNS IN THE US ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM. AMBASSADOR HAM CONFIRMED THIS IMPRESSION IN REPORTING ON HIS CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT PARK. HAM SAID THAT HE HAD URGED, IN THE INTEREST OF US CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE, RECISION OF EM-9 BUT PRESIDENT PARK ARGUED THAT EVEN THOUGH SOME RELAXATION IS JUSTIFIED, EVERY TIME HE EASES UP THE OPPOSITION TAKES THIS AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS AND PRESSES HARDER FOR OVERTHROW OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH THE NEED TO PRESS AHEAD AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENSE SELF-RELIANCE, PRESIDENT PARK FEELS PRESENT LEVEL OF CONTROLS ARE JUSTIFIED.

4. IN ADDITION TO RAISING AMERICAN CONCERNS REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS WITH EACH OF THESE TOP OFFICIALS, I ALSO POINTED OUT THAT SENTENCING OF MYONGDONG DEFENDANTS, SHOULD THEY BE FOUND GUILTY, COULD EASILY BECOME A VERY SENSITIVE ISSUE IN US, PARTICULARLY DURING ELECTION CAMPAGIN. WHILE NONE OF THESE TOP OFFICIALS COULD PREDICT WITH ANY SPECIFICITY OUTCOME OF MYONGDONG TRIAL, MOST EXPECTED MILD SENTENCES. AMBASSADOR HAM THOUGH THIS WOULD BE THE OUTCOME AFTER HIS TALK WITH PRESIDENT PARK. SPEAKER CHONG SPECULATED ALONG THE SAME LINES AND SAID

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THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO WEIGH IN AT THE CRITICAL MOMENT ON THIS ISSUE.

5. EVERY ONE OF THE TOP OFFICIALS INQUIRED CLOSELY ABOUT THE VIEWS OF DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE CARTER, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO KOREA. THEY PROFESSED LESS CONCERN IN LIGHT OF MORE RECENT STATEMENTS, BUT THEY ARE CLEARLY UNCERTAIN AND NERVOUS.

6. FROM PRIME MINISTER ON DOWN, THERE IS VERY CLEAR SATISFACTION WITH US-KOREA RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY THE POSITION OF THE US ADMINISTRATION. CONCERNS ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL ACTION AGAINST KOREA ARE DIMINISHED AS RESULT OF RECENT CONGRESSIONAL VOTES ON SECURITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION, BUT THERE ARE STILL NAGGING DOUBTS. NONE OF THE TOP OFFICIALS RAISED ANY MAJOR US-KOREAN PROBLEMS, BUT SEVERAL DID REFER TO SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

A. DEPUTY PRIMIN NAM AGAIN REFERRED TO HIS CONCERNS ABOUT EXIM BANK POLICY, BUT FELT FORTHCOMING VISIT OF PRESIDENT DUBRUL WOULD BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL;

B. DEFENSE MINISTER SUH MENTIONED AGAIN HIS DESIRE TO MOVE AHEAD ON FUTURE COMMAND RELAONSHIPS, WHILE EMPHASIZING HIS GREAT SATISFACTION WITH US ROLE ON FORCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN;

C. KCIA DIRECTOR SHIN MENTIONED HIS CONCERNS ABOUT CRITICISM OF KCIA ROLE IN US, STRESSING HIS INSTRUCTIONS TO MAINTAIN LOW KEY POSTURE IN US AND DENYING ANY KCIA CONNECTION WITH REVEREND MOON, SUZIE THOMPSON, AND DIPLOMAT BANK WHICH RUN BY KIM YONG-SAM'S BROTHER-IN-LAW;

D. FONMIN PARK REMAINS SEIZED ON VARIETY OF DEALS ON UNGA CONSIDERATION OF KOREAN ISSUE, BUT IS CLEARLY VERY SATISFIED WITH CLOSE COORDINATION WITH WOTH US AND CORE GROUP. HOWEVER, HE SHARES CONCERNS OF ALL TOP LEADERS WITH ADVERSE AFFECT DOMESTICALLY OF UN DEFEAT FOR FRIENDLY RESOLUTION.

7. ALL IN ALL, KOREAN LEADERSHIP IS EMINENTLY SATISFIED AND SELF-ASSURED, NOT ONLY WITH RESPECT TO CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS BUT FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THEIR COUNTRY.
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